



Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

Meeting Minutes

Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana
Wednesday, February 15, 2023
Indiana Government Center South

- Christine Blessinger, Director, Division of Youth Services, Department of Correction
- Dr. Kris Box, Indiana State Health Commissioner, Indiana State Department of Health
- Senator Jean Breaux
- Jay Chaudhary, Director, Division of Mental Health and Addiction, joined via Zoom (non-voting member for this meeting)
- Bernice Corley, Executive Director, Public Defender Council
- Representative Dale DeVon
- Senator Stacey Donato
- Justin Forkner, Chief Administrative Officer, Indiana Office of Judicial Administration
- Kory George, Chief Probation Officer, Wayne County Probation Department
- John Hammond IV, Office of the Governor
- Zac Jackson, Director, State Budget Agency
- Dr. Katie Jenner, Secretary of Education
- Chris Naylor, Executive Director, Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council
- Todd Rokita, Indiana Attorney General (non-voting member)
- Dana Kenworthy, Court of Appeals of Indiana
- Dr. Dan Rusyniak, M.D., Secretary, Indiana Family and Social Services Administration
- Terry Stigdon, Director, Indiana Department of Child Services
- Representative Vanessa Summers
- Stephaney Knight, Youth Commission Member
- Dejana Rodriguez, Youth Commission Member

1. Welcome

Representative DeVon called the meeting to order at 10:00am and asked the members of the Commission to introduce themselves. He also shared that Julie Whitman will be missed after this meeting and that the other legislators hoped to join the meeting at some point. Julie shared that votes on action items may be in a different order than listed on the agenda due to attendance.

2. Consent Agenda

[Minutes from the December meeting](#), approval of [recommendation to support automatic enrollment](#) of eligible students in the 21st Century Scholars program, and [approval of co-chair appointments](#) were motioned by Zachary Jackson, seconded by Dr. Rusnyniak, and approved unanimously 11-0.

3. Strategic Plan

Julie Whitman

Recommendation: Strategic Plan, Operational Plan, and Roles and Responsibilities

The presentation can be found on slides 3-15 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Julie explained the Commission's strategic planning process and what the recommended changes were. She mentioned that mostly everything, including the Commission's mission, vision, overarching principles, goal statements, and work process, stayed the same. The few changes involved objectives which guide the work of subcommittees. In the strategic area of child health and safety, the new objectives involved increasing community-based social support, housing stability, and youth voice. For the second strategic area, mental health and substance abuse, the new objectives included increasing collaboration for children with high acuity needs and screening for prenatal alcohol exposure. Julie continued with the third strategic area, educational outcomes, that included the new objective of increasing quality education for youth in residential, detention, corrections facilities, and with individualized education plans. The fourth and final strategic area, juvenile justice and cross-system youth, added the objective of supporting youth with an incarcerated parent. Julie mentioned this objective should have some sort of relationship with the Youth Justice Oversight Committee (YJOC). Next, Julie shared the recommended operational plan. First, she recommended integrating the Equity and Trauma Committees into the task forces, reviewing the purpose of the Child Services Oversight Committee, and tasking the Communications Committee with increasing the public's awareness of the Commission. The next recommendations she shared involved improving process topics, including onboarding, documents and manuals, and implementation updates. Last, she recommended incorporating more youth/family engagement and shared hopes for a future increase in staffing. Julie finished by sharing that the members' packets also included updated roles and responsibilities.

Discussion: Bernice Corley asked Julie if there is a way to obtain data around custody statuses of parents who get arrested. Julie shared that she could explore this topic with the Youth Justice Oversight Committee and agreed that it is worth looking into. Zachary Jackson asked a clarifying question about the Commission's request for a fund versus an appropriation. Julie responded by deferring to his expertise on the difference and shared the Commission is asking for a second staff person.

Blane Cook

Recommendation: Youth and Family Engagement Plan

The presentation can be found on slides 16-24 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Blane Cook introduced himself as the Commission's intern and thanked Julie and the members for the position and the opportunity to share the Youth and Family Engagement Plan. First, Blane talked about the importance of including youth and family voice, mentioning that this inclusion has shown to create better informed policy, increase community engagement, and develop advocacy skills. Blane then mentioned how increasing the quality and quantity of youth and family voice was a priority from those who participated in strategic planning. He also mentioned that this recommendation is not a policy or funding request, but just a guide to expand engagement when the time comes. He outlined the current setup, which includes the two current youth representatives and how their voice is incorporated at the end of the Commission's action item process. The first part of the plan outlined recruitment and facilitation, where he recommended partnering with a community agency because of time and qualification reasons. He also recommended eliminating the upper age limit for representation so that the Commission can incorporate both youth and family voice, including parents of those who fit the Commission's vulnerable definition. For structure, Blane recommended having a youth and family advisory group that meets

together but also allows individuals to attend task force meetings of their choice. He explained that the youth and family representatives should be compensated the same as the current youth Commission members. He also added that the chosen community partner should work with Commission staff to evaluate the level of engagement and impact. Blane listed the names of those who he consulted with for this topic and thanked them. He also offered gratitude to Julie for her work and guidance with him.

Discussion: Julie shared that this recommended plan would be in addition to the current youth representation, not to replace them. Representative DeVon asked Blane how long his internship with the Commission lasts until. Blane answered that his semester ends the first week of May. Representative DeVon thanked Blane for all his help and Blane thanked all Commission members for the opportunity. Julie asked Blane to mention the status of the current youth representatives. Blane shared that their term is expiring soon and that he will oversee the next round of applications. Terry Stigdon shared that the hybrid model worked well for DCS in leveling power dynamics.

Action: To adopt the [Strategic Plan](#), [Operational Plan](#), [Roles and Responsibilities](#), and to approve the [Youth and Family Engagement Plan](#) was moved by John Hammond, seconded by Bernice Corley, and passed unanimously 11-0.

4. Strategic Priority: Mental Health and Substance Abuse

Susan Elsworth

FASD Recommendations

The presentation can be found on slides 25-30 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Susan shared that she previously presented to the Commission and began by outlining a general lack of awareness of problems with FASD. She outlined the recommendations, which included maintaining the FASD subcommittee, training for DCS staff, juvenile justice staff, and foster parents, screening for all child welfare children, and two programs.

Discussion: Terry shared hesitation with adding training to staff requirements with curiosity surrounding if these training topics are already taking place. Susan shared her experience as a foster/adoptive parent of children with prenatal alcohol exposure and the many challenges for the youth, foster parents, and staff. She also shared that these training programs would not be expected to be implemented overnight. Terry shared that much has changed for DCS in the last two years and emphasized that training may not produce the desired outcomes but agreed that hard work should be done in prevention. Bernice Corley suggested adding DCS interaction to the FASD subcommittee and tabling the rest of the recommendations. Terry and Christine Blessinger agreed.

Action: To approve the first [FASD recommendation](#) which maintains the FASD subcommittee and incorporates DCS and DOE and to table the others was moved by Bernice Corley, seconded by Terry Stigdon, and approved unanimously 11-0.

Dr. Maria Finnell, FSSA

Presentation: Update on the work to improve service to high-acuity youth

The presentation can be found on slides 31-40 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Maria introduced herself and her project of identifying gaps and potential solutions for state systems with children with high-acuity needs. She first mentioned the progress measured by a significant decrease in child removals but emphasized the struggle in meeting the needs of high-acuity youth. To clarify, she read the definition of high-acuity youth, outlining its requirements for additional care and support. She shared the project's timeline, mentioning that they are currently meeting with other states, researching, and surveying to see what is being done. The final goal is to provide recommendations, but that is farther away. She shared results from the literature review and surveys, finding themes of interagency collaboration, data-sharing, early identification and intervention, and more. Maria also outlined the three ideal workgroups, which include a crisis response team, treatment options, and support

services. These groups would recommend policy and procedures in each area. She commented that this information is thorough and difficult, but they are trying to spread awareness.

Discussion: Representative DeVon thanked Maria and praised her group's exhaustive work in researching and interviewing.

5. Strategic Priority: Child Health and Safety

Aimee Wilkinson, Data Aims

Presentation: Synthesis of early childhood needs assessments

The presentation can be found on slides 41-55 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Julie gave an introduction, describing the Indiana Early Childhood Collaborative and the Commission's desire to engage with other collaborative groups. Aimee summarized the many different early childhood needs assessments into one. The findings are outlined in three main categories, including needs, barriers, and strengths. The main needs included access to affordable and quality services, training and professional development, young child services, and coordinated data systems. She shared the main barriers which included untreated/undiagnosed mental health, costs of services and living wage jobs, and transportation. She shared the strengths, which outlined the existence of high-quality programming, opportunities for multi-level/blended funding, and community partners.

Discussion: Bernice Corley asked if transportation is available in rural areas and/or if people know of any transportation resources. Aimee said she did not know where state funding is currently being used to help with transportation and assumed rural communities may not know about those resources, too. Dejana asked if there were any solutions for the lack of preschool teachers. Julie asked Dr. Rusyniak if he knew of any salary rates for early learning. Dr. Rusyniak responded by saying they do not pay salaries but gave Covid-19 funding to providers who then distribute wages. He also told Dejana he would share more information with her about who received funding across the state.

6. Strategic Priority: Juvenile Justice and Cross-System Youth

Justice Steven David

Presentation: Update on the Youth Justice Oversight Committee

Justice David started by referencing the Youth Justice Oversight Committee's grants report. He shared the next meeting will take place April 12 to review all draft reports. He also praised the youth and family input from those with lived experience in the workgroup process. He mentioned that the reports will deliver the statutory requirements and recommendations. He complimented and thanked Julie and wished her luck in the future.

7. Executive Director Hire

Representative DeVon thanked Senator Donato for leading the process in hiring a new executive director. Senator Donato introduced Mark Fairchild and shared her excitement. Senator Donato asked for a vote, which was approved unanimously 12-0. Julie complimented Mark and shared that he is a perfect fit to lead the Commission.

Next Meeting

Wednesday, April 19, 2022, 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. Indiana Government Center South, Conference Room C, 302 W. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN 46204.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:51 a.m.